

23 Feb 07 RE SB 522 (Weinberg)

RxP Testimony of George Watson, Chair of Board of Psychologists

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. (Public Health, Welfare & Safety)

My name is Dr. Watson, George Watson; I am the Chair of the State Board of Psychologists and wish to speak in favor of SB 522. Prescription privileges for properly trained psychologists... commonly known as RxP

The executive summary of my comments is that the Board was motivated to consider this SB 522 b/c of seeing the significant need. We were persuaded to support i... by seeing its safety.

You will hear comments today from both supporters and opponents. Concern will be expressed about patient safety...and right it should be. Being concerned about patient safety is nothing new for the BOP.

I spent about 15 years as a state ORAL examiner for psychologists ...(in a state south of here whose name I'm not allowed to mention in public)...As an oral examiner for psychologists seeking licensure, an overriding theme there was to assure that individuals we certified for licensure "would do no harm." This was above and beyond assessing competence. Our job is to protect the public. The same is true in MT; It is that way for every state.

The BOP paid significant attention to the matter of properly trained psychologists being able to prescribe safely. We discussed if our Board could adequately determine appropriate training and assessment criteria for that to happen.. We concluded with a resounding "YES" ...we could. Some points we considered were;

1. Psychologists nationwide are commonly asked to participate in the development of assessment processes for many tasks and occupations. They receive an extraordinary amount of training in the content of assessment and process...an extraordinary amount of training.

2 Successful Training models have already been developed. The training module first used by the DOD was reviewed and modified by an APA task force back in 1996 to create a curriculum used as a base model by prescribing psychologists in NM and LA. ASPPB has also developed a very similar model. Given our Hx as a Board here in MT, I would tell you that our Board would propose training and certification criteria that would **meet... or exceed** those criteria set by APA and ASPPB. This training has and will produce safety in prescribing. Just to reiterate a point made by Dr. Butz of the Montana Psych Assoc, the American Psychological Association reports tracking over 30K Rx written by prescribing psychologists. Not a single one has resulted in adverse effects, NOT a single one. That fact is indicative of an excellent training and certification process.

3. MT BOP is considered to have one of the most stringent and rigorous licensing exam processes in the nation for psychologists. People may occasionally say disparaging things about psychologists and/or the Board, but I guarantee you, no one will ever say that our licensing process is anything but extensive and the most rigorous. This body..and the legislature...can expect the same level of rigorous review and decision making from the Board to carry out those responsibilities delineated in SB 522.

4. The Board of Optometry has demonstrated how a state Board can develop and implement Rules for safe prescribing. A few years back, Optometrists asked for prescription privileges in a scope of practice legislation and were given approval by this legislature. From all accounts, that process has worked well. A review of disciplinary activity re the Optometry Board shows no discipline action taken within the last five fiscal years against a licensee for Rx errors or any drug/alcohol related issues. (only data for the last five years were available to me)

5. There has been no increase in malpractice insurance rates as a result of a licensed psychologist becoming a prescribing psychologist.

There were additional topics considered and discussed but let me stop with six:

6. Psychologists are prone to consult. I can assure you that the Board would have one or more committees that would address the issue of developing training and certification criteria and process. We would ask for prescribers to be part of the process as well as other individuals that the Board decides

would be professionally helpful. We ask that you...allow yourselves to recognize the integrity of the Board to do its legislatively determined duty. We, ...as a Board, are committed to the safety of Montanans. That's our duty,That's our pledge.

So in closing, let me repeat what I said at the beginning:
The Board was motivated to consider SB 522 b/c of seeing the significant need. We were persuaded to support it... by seeing its safety.

Thank you Senators... for your time and consideration. We urge your support of SB 522